

Docket Item # 3
BAR CASE #2011-0362

BAR Meeting
January 18, 2012

ISSUE: Certificate of Appropriateness

APPLICANT: Allen & Rebecca Weh by Christine Kelly, AIA

LOCATION: 400 N Union Street

ZONE: RM / Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends denial of the Certificate of Appropriateness for the dormer on the front (east) façade.

Staff recommends approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness for the dormer on the rear (west) façade, the roof deck, and the shutters on the east and south façades with the following conditions:

1. That the railing detail for the roof deck be more historically appropriate by using wide plinths spaced between simple balusters, with the final design to be approved by Staff;
2. That the center window on the rear (west) dormer be offset from the adjacent windows by at least 8”;
3. That the size of HardiePlank siding on the rear (west) dormer is reduced from a 7” exposure to a 5” exposure;
4. That the HardiePlank siding be smooth (no wood grain);
5. That the HardiePlank siding on the rear (west) dormer be painted to match the composition roof, so that the dormer will visually appear as individual dormers;
6. That the new asphalt shingle roof on the front and rear be architectural grade composition roofing in either a weathered wood or slate color, per the *BAR Roof Materials Policy*; and
7. That all new windows comply with the recently adopted Window Policy.

****EXPIRATION OF APPROVALS NOTE:** In accordance with Sections 10-106(B) and 10-206(B) of the Zoning Ordinance, any official Board of Architectural Review approval will expire 12 months from the date of final approval if the work is not commenced and diligently and substantially pursued by the end of that 12-month period.

****BUILDING PERMIT NOTE:** Most projects approved by the Board of Architectural Review require the issuance of one or more construction permits by Building and Fire Code Administration (including siding or roofing over 100 square feet, windows and signs). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary construction permits after receiving Board of Architectural Review approval. Contact Code Administration, Room 4200, City Hall, 703-746-4200 for further information.



BAR CASE #2011-0362



I. ISSUE

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness at 400 N Union Street for the following:

1. Composite shutters installed on east and south facades (using existing hardware).
2. New roof deck with a 3'-0" high composite guardrail.
3. New shed dormer addition on rear (west façade).
4. Dormer reconfiguration on the front (east façade).

II. HISTORY

The dwelling at 400 North Union Street is a one of a group of 86 three-story brick townhouses bounded by North Union, North Lee, Queen and Oronoco Streets which was approved by City Council in 1968 (Special Use Permit #1084) and constructed in **1971**. At the time the area was developed it was not within the boundaries of the Old and Historic Alexandria District, but it was added to the district in June of 1984. 400 N Union is a 3½ story, two-bay, end unit constructed in a simple Colonial Revival style. It has a brick façade laid in a running bond pattern, cast concrete sills, and a front facing garage. The N. Union address and the ghost marks around the window to the left of the garage door indicate that the front entry of the townhouse was originally located where the first floor window is on the N. Union façade.

This same applicant had a case before the BAR in September of 2011 (BAR2011-0245), in which the Board approved a window replacement, a rear patio door replacement, new exterior electric lights, and window resizing on the two first floor window openings. Since then, the applicant decided to only resize the window on the east façade, putting in an arched feature window (figure 8).

It is noted that the architect that worked with the applicant on BAR Case #2011-0245 had discussed the possibility of including the reconfiguration of the dormers on the front façade in the initial application. However, the applicant did not pursue dormer alteration at that time.

III. ANALYSIS

The proposed project complies with Zoning Ordinance regulations.

Shutters

The applicant is proposing to install dark grey paneled, solid composite shutters on the front (east) and side (south) façades. The *Design Guidelines* state that "window shutters should be hinged and operable" and "should be the appropriate size and shape for the opening." The townhouse is of the Colonial Revival style, on which shutters are common, and has single width window openings. This structure previously had shutters as evident by the remaining hardware, which the applicant intends to reuse. The shutters will overlap on the front (east) façade in order to meet the required size needed to properly close over the window openings. While high quality wood shutters are encouraged, the new Minor Architectural Elements Policy states that composite/synthetic shutters may be acceptable for buildings constructed after 1970, if they are constructed of a solid, millable material with a smooth or subtle wood grain surface and are field

painted. Staff believes adding shutters to the house will create much more visual interest on an otherwise unadorned façade.

At this point, the applicant has chosen not to install shutters on the first floor arched feature window on the front (east) façade; however, Staff supports the installation of arched shutters if the applicant wishes to install shutters on this window in the future.

Roof Deck

The applicant is proposing a simple 3'0" high composite railing that runs along the perimeter of the roof. There will also be a matching railing around the opening for the hatch which will provide egress. Although most of the roofs of the townhouse complex appear to be gable designs from the street, they are actually flat for a large portion of the central area. Many homeowners have adapted the large attic areas below for living space and desire to use the flat roof areas for observation of the Potomac River. Similar roof decks have been approved at 111 Queen Street (BAR Case #95-0033, 4/5/95) 105 Quay Street (BAR Case #2001-0121, 7/18/01), 402 N Union Street (BAR Case #2000-0240, 11/15/2000), and 424 N Union Street (BAR Case#2003-0105, 6/4/2003).

The *Design Guidelines* state that “roof decks should be constructed so that they do not interfere with the historic roofline of a building” and that they should be built using “materials which are sympathetic to the building materials generally found in the historic district.” They also suggest that they should be painted the color of the trim work, which the applicant intends to do.

While Staff is not opposed to the concept of a roof deck, Staff feels that the proposed design reflects a typical suburban deck railing instead of reflecting historical detailing which would be more appropriate for the Colonial Revival style. Staff suggests that instead of thin posts, the applicant use wide plinths. On the front façade, the plinths should align above each masonry pier. On the side, Staff recommends a plinth on each end with two equally spaced in between. The plinths on the rear should match the spacing used on the front. In between the plinths should be simple straight balusters. Staff supports the use of a solid and paintable composite wood material for the guardrail, given the late 20th century age of the house.



Figure 1: Example of appropriate detailing for railing.

Front Dormer (east façade)

The original use for the fourth floor of the townhouses in this development was for attic storage. As homeowners have tried to take advantage of the views of the river and the extra space, many have requested new dormers on the front and rear in order to increase the useable floor area. 400 N. Union was originally built with three individual dormers of the appropriate scale and massing for this size townhouse. In order for the applicant to make the fourth floor a master suite, they

are proposing to turn the three individual dormers on the front into one large Palladian style dormer with 2'-2" x 4'-0" clad casement windows. The *Design Guidelines* state that "dormers should align with the existing windows or be centered between the windows." Historically, "dormers are generally tall and narrow with minimal trim at the sides of the windows." Staff recommends the denial of the Palladian dormer on the front façade, as the existing dormers are of the appropriate design, scale, and placement. While other Palladian dormers have been incorporated onto the front of these townhouses, Staff feels that continued use of them will have an adverse effect on the development and the view from Founders Park because of the cumulative alteration of the scale of these buildings.

Rear Dormer (west façade)

The applicant is proposing to add a shed dormer to the rear façade. While Staff does not support the proposed front dormer, Staff can support the one on the rear as it is located on the least visually prominent portion of the roof. However, Staff recommends that the design of the rear dormer be altered to make it appear to be two individual dormers when viewed from the side street. To do this, the center window needs to be recessed by at least 8". In addition, Staff recommends painting the HardiePlank siding on the ends of the dormer and on the recessed panel the same color as the roof so that it will further create the allusion of individual dormers. Staff also conditions that the HardiePlank be reduced from a 7" exposure to a 5" exposure, as 7" would be overwhelming on such a small area. The HardiePlank should be smooth (no wood grain) in order to conform with the Board's *Fiber Cement Policy*. The windows on the rear dormer will be 2'-6" x 4'-6" aluminum clad simulated divided light windows in a 6/6 light configuration, matching the other two windows on the rear.



Figure 2: Ariel view of the 400 block of N Union showing existing roof decks and dormers.

STAFF

Courtney Lankford, Historic Preservation Planner, Planning & Zoning
Al Cox, FAIA, Historic Preservation Manager, Planning & Zoning

IV. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F- finding

Code Administration

- F-1 The review by Code Administration is a preliminary review only. Once the applicant has filed for a building permit, code requirements will be based upon the building permit plans. If there are any questions, the applicant may contact Ken Granata, Acting Plan Review Supervisor at ken.granata@alexandriava.gov or 703-746-4193. (Code)
- C-1 Building and trades permits are required for this project. Five sets of *construction documents* sealed by a *Registered Design Professional* that fully detail the construction as well as layout and schematics of the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems shall accompany the permit application(s).
- C-2 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-3 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-4 The architect shall provide a building code analysis with the following building code data on the plan: a) use group; b) number of stories; c) type of construction; d) floor area; e) fire protection; f) ceiling height; g) brace wall locations and type.
- C-5 All exterior walls shall comply with Table R302.1 of the 2009 USBC (2009 IRC as amended). See section R302.2 for *Townhouse* exception.
- C-6 Rooftop anchorage/installation details shall be submitted for new condensing unit installation.
- C-7 Electrical wiring methods and other electrical requirements shall comply with IRC and NFPA #70, 2008.
- C-8 A wall location plat prepared by a land surveyor is required to be submitted to this office prior to requesting any framing inspection.

V. IMAGES



Figure 3: N Union Street façade.

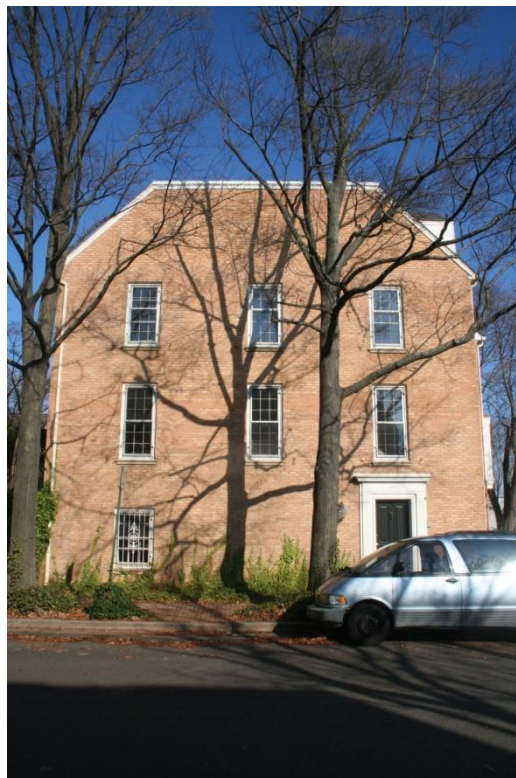


Figure 4: Princess Street façade.



Figure 5: Rear façade.



Figure 6: View of rear façade from Princess Street. Arrow indicates placement of proposed dormer.



Figure 7: Existing Conditions/Proposed Demolition.



Figure 8: Proposed Alterations.